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A CORRECTION

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There were, it is certain, many who traced with delight the intellectual and religious personality of Troeltsch the lecturer, immanent in Professor Miller's article in the October (1913) number of *The Harvard Theological Review*. That article contained however one misstatement which should be corrected as speedily as may be. It said,¹ "Theodor Kaftan, in his misleading brochure on Troeltsch, accuses him of being a pantheist," adding the probable reason why Kaftan does so. As matter of fact, in the book referred to—*Ernst Tröltzsch* with the sub-title *Eine kritische Zeitstudie*—Dr. Kaftan accuses Troeltsch of nothing of the sort. He refers indeed to Troeltsch as holding a doctrine of transmigration which is brought to an end by each soul's ultimate return to and absorption in God. Undoubtedly, this might easily appear to a vague recollection of the book as pantheism. Kaftan however mentions this very idea of Troeltsch, later in the critical portion of his study, as being not so Buddhistic as at first it seems, and as being in any case not an expression of the essential Troeltsch; and he concludes as follows: "I call this a turning aside (*Entgleisung*) the more confidently because otherwise there would appear here an outcropping of pantheism which Tröltzsch elsewhere *so energetically attacks*."² Indeed, far from accusing Troeltsch of pantheism Kaftan categorically in two other passages defends him from the charge. For example: "*Tröltzsch ist zweifellos Theist. Aller pantheistischen Verflüchtigung des Gottesbegriffes tritt er je und je entgegen*";³ and again "*Tröltzsch (ist) ein entschiedener Theist, der Front macht gegen alle pantheistische Verschwommenheit*."⁴

Speaking in general, Kaftan's pamphlet may be mistaken, as most of the readers of this *Review* will think, but it is scarcely misleading. For one reader at least, though that reader did not agree with it, this critique of Troeltsch was not only extremely interesting, but highly profitable, presenting as it did briefly and energetically the case of orthodox "positive" theology against modern scientific theology. The book is from its point of view a "Tract for the Times." Its vigorous polemic is not so much against Troeltsch as

¹ Page 431.² Page 66; italics mine.³ Page 32.⁴ Page 62.

against what Troeltsch represents—the modern *Weltanschauung* and in particular its “*Antisupranaturalismus*.”

Troeltsch, the man, is for Dr. Kaftan a person of deep and warm religious feeling, “moved at bottom by Christian and not Neo-platonic interests”; but Troeltsch’s basal points of view are and can be for Kaftan but anathema. Aside from certain inconsistencies of which Troeltsch is accused, and apart from certain abhorrent details, such as Troeltsch’s rejection of conversion and his suggestion that the church should confine itself to cultus, giving over religious education to the state—its teachers being trained by the university theological faculties—the argument is, summarily: Troeltsch lacks certainty, being condemned to relativism and subjectivism. He has no absolute, no revelation, no authority by which norms are “given”; instead, he depends upon the increasing approximation of values (“*Annäherungswerte*”), with which he operates as an absolute. He accepts in history that only which can be arrived at by strict historic method. He studies Christianity not as *the* religion but as a religion, and so, summing up all and most damnable of all, he is a philosopher of religion and not a theologian.

Kaftan for his part admits the value of science, but asserts in loud italics that science can never grasp the supernatural. He has developed his own program as to how science and revelation are to live together in regard to history. It is contained in his distinction between “*historisch*”—that which is established by historic method—and the equally valid “*geschichtlich*”—all that ever happened, including what revelation tells us of, as well as the “*historisch*.” This amounts obviously to denying science all right of veto—the very service of science and especially of historical science, which has been most salutary to religion.

In fact Kaftan’s book is for its readers itself a “*Zeitstudie*,” giving valuable assistance to the liberal religious thinker who is earnest in his desire to understand the conservative’s theological position. The main contentions of the book are an indication how far a passion for security and solidity will carry thought which yields itself up to it. Its condemnation is that it puts the feeling of certainty above the august austere truth. Clearly, Kaftan, like Cardinal Newman in a similar situation, had no actual certainty at the moment when he first decided to swallow this bolus of revelation, which is, from that moment on, his guarantee of assurance. Having made his initial induction, how has he the effrontery to object to Troeltsch’s own inductive procedure when he assumes norms to be true without apodictic proof, because he sees them increasingly

approximating truth? Has Kaftan never heard of faith? And surely the faith of Troeltsch and the modern man is not less precious and sublime for being wise and open-eyed and mindful of the forbiddings of science! As for Kaftan's declaration that Troeltsch is not a theologian, that charge can be borne with equanimity. It reminds one of a recent contention of Stephan⁵—though for different reasons—that the word Protestantism should be limited to the visible and so-called “church”; here also as against Troeltsch's broad conception of a “modern Protestantism” which includes all the spiritual forces and currents of the present. There is still prevalent something of the old prejudice of “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.” It cannot however long survive among the educated unless as they wax fat they ignore all cults of religion, as there are some signs of their doing. If that happens, conservative religious inanities will persist and ought to persist. For it is better to err intellectually in a two-compartment theology such as Kaftan's than to err spiritually because of the lack of historic religion. But best of all it is to have many scientific *and* religious men in our universities—men like Ernst Troeltsch!

⁵ Die heutigen Auffassungen vom Neuprotestantismus. Giessen, 1911.